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12 January 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director (Plans)
Deputy Director (Intelligence)
Deputy Director (Research)

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1. Pursuant to the suggestion contained in paragraph 2 of Action [redacted] dated 11 January 1963, there is transmitted herewith a copy of the "talk paper" referred to therein.
 2. It should be noted that the content of this paper, with few exceptions, was lifted verbatim from the Director's report to the PFIAB on intelligence community activities relating to the Cuban arms build-up, and no new thoughts have been introduced.
 3. It is requested that any comments you may have be submitted to me not later than COB 14 January 1963.

[redacted]
Inspector General

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Attachment

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cc: ✓DCI
Executive Director
Mr. Elder
OGC

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when enclosure is detached.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Between midsummer and fall of 1962 the Soviets attempted, within a very short period of time, to convert Cuba into a powerful strategic base.

These events were occurring in the environment of Castro's police-state controls, reinforced by the Soviets' own security precautions, making their detection and reporting difficult.

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II. COLLECTION REQUIREMENTS

In late 1961, in order to provide a sound basis for future U. S. policy toward Cuba, the intelligence community was instructed to increase its intelligence and action capabilities. Resulting intelligence community actions included increasing U-2 overflights from one to two flights per month, creating a [redacted]

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[redacted] for the intelligence exploitation of Cuban refugees, and stepping up substantially the world-wide intelligence collection effort on Cuba.

While these actions had been initiated prior to the start of the Soviet build-up, it was this series of actions which placed the community in a position of readiness when the Soviet build-up began in late July and early August.

The broad framework of requirements on Cuba, which was in the community's possession before the build-up, was comprehensive enough to include guidance for the gathering of information on the scope and pace of the Soviet arms build-up including missiles.

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IV. REPORTING ON THE BUILD-UP

During 1961 and early 1962 there were numerous reports from ground observers about missile activity in Cuba. Until August 1962, overhead photography disproved almost all such reports. The few that could not be disproved could not be confirmed.

The reporting of all types of information on Cuba was massive, and it grew as collection facilities were increasingly focussed on the arms build-up. The reports indicated to the community that the speed and magnitude of the influx of Bloc personnel and equipment into a non-Bloc country was unprecedented in Soviet military aid activities.

From mid-April to mid-October there were over a thousand human-source reports on the arms build-up. Screening of these, even in retrospect, reveals only a handful that can be related to offensive missile activity. These few, which began to reach the community after mid-September, were suggestive enough to arouse the suspicions of the analysts, but did not provide hard evidence.

Our limited intelligence assets within the Soviet Union did not detect the detailed planning and extensive assembly of materials destined for Cuba. However, once the weapons were on their way, the intelligence community succeeded, in a very short period of time, in discovering and reporting the facts.

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V. DISSEMINATION OF THE REPORTS

Raw information reports on the Cuban arms build-up, like all such reports, were widely disseminated throughout the intelligence community.

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From early September there was a restriction on publishing intelligence on offensive weapons in Cuba. This restriction, however, did not affect the flow of raw information to analysts.

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VI. PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The composite of information reaching the analysts on the Cuban arms build-up was unique in peacetime intelligence operations. By the end of August the total volume of reporting reaching the analysts had become a virtual deluge.

The intelligence community was understandably cautious in raising any alarm over the possibility of MRBM's in Cuba. The time span was very short and the evidence was inconclusive. The MRBM's probably did not arrive in Cuba before 3 September. Because of the difficulty in getting communications out of Cuba, the first reporting suggesting the presence of MRBM's in Cuba did not reach Washington until after mid-September.

By 3 October, the analytical process had funneled these reports into the targeting mechanism, resulting in the 14 October U-2 flight, originally approved to test the operational readiness of a SAM site, being flown over an area where MRBM's might be found.

The analytic effort identified each of the major weapons systems introduced into Cuba before the system reached operational capability. It should be noted, however, that the intelligence community would have been hard pressed to devote a similar effort to a similar problem occurring in some other part of the world at the same time.

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VII. THE INTELLIGENCE PUBLICATIONS

The most immediate reflection of the intelligence analysts' work appears first in current intelligence publications and later in estimative papers.

Because of restrictions on publishing information concerning offensive weapons in Cuba, there were delays and gaps in the published information, but not in the flow of raw information. The purpose of the restraint on publishing was to restrict the information to those who needed to know it for purposes of analysis and action. The effect was to concentrate the information at the decision-making levels of the Government.

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VIII. THE ESTIMATES ON CUBA

Before the discovery of strategic missiles in Cuba on 14 October the community had, in 1962, produced two National Intelligence Estimates and one Special National Intelligence Estimate. Each of these estimates discussed the possibility of Soviet use of Cuba as a strategic base, and each, including that of 19 September, concluded that the Soviets would consider the risk of U.S. retaliation too great.

Through long experience in estimating Soviet policy, the estimators had developed some sense of the limits within which the Soviets might operate. Until 14 October the evidence on the military build-up did not clearly indicate to the estimators that the Soviets would accept the risks involved in deploying offensive weapons systems to Cuba. The size and speed of the build-up and the obvious military advantage the Soviets would gain from a strategic base in Cuba caused them to examine this contingency in detail in preparing the 19 September estimate. They concluded, however, that such an action would involve an unacceptable degree of risk and would therefore be unlikely.

On 19 October, the U.S. Intelligence Board estimated that in reaction to certain U.S. courses of action the Soviet leaders would not deliberately initiate general war or take military measures, which in their calculation, would run the gravest risk of general war. This estimate was correct.

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IX. CHRONOLOGY OF CUBAN U-2 OVERFLIGHTS

Overhead reconnaissance of Cuba with U-2 aircraft began on 26 October 1960. Between that date and 12 October 1962, CIA flew a total of 54 missions.

As of mid-April 1962, authority for U-2 missions was increased from one to two per month.

The 29 August mission, which completed the two authorized missions for August, covered the length of the island and found eight SAM sites in western Cuba and what was later learned to be a cruise missile site at Banes.

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A mission flown on 5 September over the eastern and central portions of the island found three additional SAM sites in central Cuba.

At a meeting on 10 September, the Secretary of State expressed concern over CIA's planned coverage of Cuba, involving extensive peripheral coverage as well as two legs directly over Cuban air space, all in one flight. As a result, CIA split the proposed coverage into four parts, involving four separate flights. Because of bad weather the four flights, covering portions of the island which had not been photographed since 5 August, were not completed until 7 October.

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From 18 September through 2 October, agent and refugee reports dovetailed sufficiently to create the hypothesis that there was something of unusual importance going on in a definite area west of Havana and that ground observer reports of missile site construction there needed to be confirmed or denied by photography.

On 9 October it was agreed that first priority should be given to one U-2 mission in the western part of the island. If this flight did not activate ground-to-air fire, a number of similar sorties would be mounted.

On 12 October operational control of U-2 overflights of Cuba was transferred to the Strategic Air Command.

A mission was flown by SAC on 14 October over an area west of Havana to test the operational readiness of SAM sites and to look for suspected offensive missile activity. The flight was the first to discover the presence of MRBM's.

On 16 October approval was given for an unlimited number of flights over Cuba. SAC flew 20 missions between 14 and 22 October, the date of the President's statement to the Nation.

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X1. CONCLUSIONS

The intelligence community operated extensively and well in connection with Cuba. Every major weapons system introduced into Cuba by the Soviets was detected, identified and reported before any one of these systems attained an operational capability.

Aerial photography was very effective and our best means of establishing hard intelligence. The procedures adopted in September delayed photographic intelligence, but photography prior to about 17 October would not have been sufficient to warrant action of a type which would require support from Western Hemisphere or NATO allies.

The 19 September estimate, while indicating lack of probability that MRBM's would be placed in Cuba, did state that "this contingency must be examined carefully." The estimators in preparing the 19 September estimate gave great weight to the philosophical argument concerning Soviet intentions and thus did not fully weigh the indicators which would have led to a contrary conclusion.

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